

his willingness to recreate the violence that had overturned Fusion rule in Wilmington.⁹⁴ The bravado of the Atlanta campaign suggests that the lack of governmental response to the violence in Wilmington gave Southerners implicit license to suppress the black community under the right circumstances, as, for example, in response to a perceived black crime wave. Just as Wilmington whites used newspapers to assist in their attempts to regain power, Atlanta's leaders used Georgia papers to fuel the flames of the impending riot and subsequently to provide a modicum of calm and justification for the violence.⁹⁵

Following the Wilmington and Atlanta riots, southern states experienced relative calm since whites had gained a strong footing in their control over blacks through Jim Crow legislation and intimidation. White lynch mobs still held both whites and blacks in check. However, by the 1921 Tulsa riot and the 1923 Rosewood riot, the threat of black-on-white sexual assault still proved to be a strong force in instigating violence that spread to include large numbers of black victims and black property loss. Further, the lack of state and federal response to vigilante violence demonstrated a tolerance of such behavior by white leaders, nearly sanctioning the activity through nonintervention.⁹⁶

Tulsa's riot represented likely the most violent racial clash in American history. After an initial encounter between whites and blacks outside the city's jail on

the night of May 31, 1921, whites prepared their invasion. The Tulsa police department deputized dozens of whites who murdered African Americans. White mobs looted black homes before setting them on fire. Blacks attempted to defend themselves by taking up arms against the white invasion, but the state militia entered the African American enclave known as Greenwood and disarmed blacks and confined them to city parks, leaving their homes and families unprotected. Thirty-five blocks, the heart of the city's black community, were destroyed. Estimates of the death toll vary from 75 to 300. Legal scholar Alfred L. Brophy emphasized the role of the state guard in facilitating the destruction of the black community, in a manner not entirely different from the activities witnessed in Wilmington and Atlanta.⁹⁷

Whereas some Wilmington whites believed that the riot marked a positive turning point in the city's history, those in the white communities in Atlanta and Tulsa recognized the need to present their riots as aberrations and placate the black community. Their efforts appear to have been directed more toward potential investors rather than black victims, particularly given the hollow effort toward compensation. Historian Wayne Mixon contended that Atlanta's commercial-civic elite orchestrated the riot to impose their vision of the city's future. Atlanta and Tulsa presented an image of a repentant white leadership that had restored the pre-riot order disrupted by the violence of the lower class of whites. In Atlanta, the Committee of Ten was formed to illustrate to outsiders that order had been restored and that white elites cared for their black neighbors. The Civic League and the Colored Cooperative were established to facilitate communication between the races. The Committee of Ten distributed relief, but their efforts reflected a

⁹⁴ Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot*, 69-70; Crowe, "Racial Violence and Social Reform," 243; Hunter, *Joy*, 124.

⁹⁵ Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Colour Line: An Account of Negro Citizenship in the American Democracy* (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1908), 5.

⁹⁶ "A Documented History of the Incident Which Occurred at Rosewood, Florida, in January 1923" presented to the Florida House of Representatives, December 22, 1993.

⁹⁷ Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*, chapter 3.